

Revelation 12–16: The Child, Dragon, 2 Beasts, Saved, and 7 Plagues

2024 Winter Series | Galena church of Christ

Welcome. Review. Introduction.

Last trumpet = God's finally bringing judgment. Chapter 12 begins second half. First half = God's judgments on the enemy. Focus not on when (timeline), but what (God's judgment). Not immediate judgment as God is giving the enemies of God and God's people opportunity to repent. Second half = evil nature of the enemy of God and God's people. This is to show why they are to be punished. Overall theme = victory in Jesus!

Cycle 3, chapters 12–14, Seven Figures

Chapters 12–14 discuss details surrounding seven important figures: 1) the victorious pregnant woman, 2) the son born to the woman, 3) the great red dragon, 4) the archangel Michael, 5) the beast from the sea, 6) the beast from the land, 7) the Lamb. These seven figures are all involved in some sort of struggle for power or control. (King)

Chapter 12

The woman and the dragon = God's people will struggle at the hand of the dragon and his minions (Roman Empire?).

Woman = God's people. Her crown = victory (cf. Genesis 37:9). This scene is depicted in the constellations (see charts). This scene is also depicted in "Christian" art (see charts).

Some even use this scene to identify the day and hour Jesus was born (see charts), the evening of the first day of Tishri (same as creation, birth of Noah, and 9/11).

The son = Jesus, the Good / Great Shepherd of the nations (cf. Psalm 2). Verse 5 mentions his birth and then immediately his ascension, encompassing his life, his work on the cross, his resurrection, and his ascension. He was victorious over the great red dragon!

The dragon's seven heads = perceived to be God or a god. Horns in apocalyptic literature = strength. Ten horns = really strong. Compare the explanation of the seven heads and ten horns of the beast, a minion of the dragon, in Revelation 17:9–13 (seven mountains, seven kings, ten kings).

However, the scene was very common in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. The story of Apollo describes how Apollo was the product of an adulterous encounter between Zeus and Leto. Zeus's wife Hera sent Pytho(n) to attack Leto. According to the story, Apollo was destined to kill the serpent. Zeus sent Leto to the island Delos and Poseidon hid the island under water. Apollo comes to Delphi and defeats Pytho the serpent. Apollo is depicted as a victor with a laurel wreath, harp, and bow. All the Roman emperors depicted themselves as the god Apollo in various ways. Domitian's wife Domitia Longina is even depicted on a coin as sitting on a moon! (McClister)

The Old Testament also describes a serpent (Rahab) as the enemy of God's people and the victory God has over the dragon: Job 26:12–13 (Rahab = serpent); Psalm 87:4; 89:10; Isaiah 51:9; Jeremiah 51:34.

John uses this story to demonstrate the truth of the victory of Jesus and his disciples over the serpent. John uses the story to mock the Roman Empire and their false gods, including the emperors.

Wilderness = God provides and tests whether people will trust God. 1260 days = 3.5 years = an indefinite, though limited time.

Compare Psalm 2; Isaiah 51:2–3, 9–11; 66:7–16.

The dragon is the devil, satan. He and his minions wage war with God and his angels in heaven. Satan is defeated in heaven. And now wars with God's people on earth (cf. Ephesians 6:12ff; 2 Corinthians 10:4). This means God's people are in the middle of the war in which they will be persecuted as a part of the war. He is the accuser of God's people (cf. Job 1:9).

Michael = archangel in Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9.

God's people conquer the dragon by the blood of the Lamb (cf. John 16:33)!

Two wings of the eagle = God's protection and escape from the enemy (cf. Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32:11; Isaiah 40:31).

Flood out of the mouth of the dragon = false and deceptive teaching (cf. Genesis 3); the people of God resist while the earth (=the people of the world) soaks it up.

Chapter 13

The beast out of the sea mirrors the dragon, with seven heads and ten horns. The sea = realm of chaos where the dragon dwelled; maybe also the city of Rome which was distant from Asia Minor. This beast does whatever the dragon wants it to do. The mortal wound that was healed might represent a legend in the latter half of the first century that Nero was going to be resurrected. Perhaps John is identifying Domitian as the resurrected Nero, as Domitian engaged in ruthless persecution like Nero.

Verse 8 speaks of the worship of the beast = emperor worship. Christians would not have participated which would have resulted in their persecution even to the point of death.

Verses 9–10, call for the saints to endure and keep faith amid such persecution.

The beast that comes out of the land probably represents more localized forms of persecution in Asia Minor, possibly the emperor cult. It is like the first beast and speaks with the same message and strength. It deceives the people into worshiping the image of the first beast (the emperor).

The number 666 is perhaps a use of gematria (using letters, like that of a name, to represent a number) and identify a specific name, either in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or even Latin. However, this may also be a case of showing how the demonic trinity (the dragon and the two beasts) fall short of perfection despite their attempts to mimic the Holy Trinity in a resurrection, signs and wonders, etc. (King).

Chapter 14

The Lamb and the 144,000, vv1–5. A new vision showing the victorious Lamb and his disciples (cf. chapter 7). This is the end of the cycle of the seven figures of chapters 12–14, and it shows that despite the attempts of the demonic trinity of chapters 12 and 13, ultimately the Lamb is victorious and all who follow him, even to the point of death, are victorious with him.

The Message of the Three Angels, vv6–13. The first angel calls all people to fear, glorify, and worship God (instead of the beast or image of the beast). The second angel announces fall of Babylon (Rome) in judgment. The third angel announces the judgment against those who feared, glorified, and worshiped the beast.

Verses 12–13 provide an invitation for all people.

The Harvest of the Earth, vv14–20. A vision of a coming of the Son of Man on a cloud that results in judgment, though probably not THE second coming / final judgment (cf. Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 2; 21; Daniel 7:13; Matthew 3:12; 9:37; 13:30; 25:24, 26, 31; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 2 Thessalonians 1:7).

Out of the altar / temple = God's judgment.

Double telling = certainty and severity of God's judgment.

Lots of blood = complete destruction in severe judgment of the enemies of God and his people.

Cycle 4, chapters 15–16, the Seven Bowls

Chapters 15–16

Chapter 15. John has another vision. This serves as an interlude praising the Lamb and the victory of the faithful. “Great and amazing” = OT language of plagues. The “last” emphasizes the consummation of God's wrath. This chapter also introduces the seven angels with the seven plagues in seven bowls that are described in chapter 16.

Chapter 16. God's seven-fold judgment against the Roman emperor / government. Mimics the 10 plagues against Egypt when God delivered his people from oppression and slavery.

Verses 13–14 begin with the demonic trinity of the dragon, the beast (Rome), and the false prophet (emperor cult). The three unclean spirits are: unclean = Babylon; frogs = plague against Egypt and its false gods (frogs considered the dirtiest animals among Rabbis); demonic spirits = demons (real, spiritual beings) behind the idols of false worship (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:19–22 w/ Deuteronomy 32:17). Perhaps these demonic spirit frogs are connected with the emperor cult that is attempting to get all people to worship the emperor as god; they are stirring up rebellion against the true God. There is war made against God and his people, but God is always victorious.

“The great day of God Almighty” = a day of judgment, often not a specific day (punctiliar) but a reference to the general outcome that God brings complete destruction. Lord of hosts of the OT.

Verse 15, one of the seven beatitudes of Revelation: keep your faith; don't let the war discourage you or cause you to quit (cf. 3:18).

Verse 16, Har Megeddon = mount of Megiddo. There is actually no Mount of Megiddo (closest mountain is Tabor). In the OT several important battles took place near Megiddo. This is not a literal description of a literal war on or near Megiddo at some point in the future with Russians and Chinese fighting against the nations of the West. Instead, it is figurative and emphasizes the certainty of God's defeat over his enemies. There is no description of any actual battle. Instead, the next and the last plague says, "It's over. God won. End of story."

The split of the city in the last plague is a reference to the destruction of Babylon (Rome) and its allies. Everything connected with Babylon is destroyed. The huge hail stones represent destruction and judgment from God.

Conclusion and Applications

Revelation 12:11, God's people conquer the dragon by the blood of the Lamb (cf. John 16:33)!

Revelation 13:10, here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Revelation 14:12, here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Revelation 14:13: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.

Revelation 16:15, Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his clothes on = keeping discernment and faith in Jesus!

The enemy is defeated. God wins. End of story.